Beeping. I'm awake. My legs are asleep. I step outside of the car and start breathing in some of the crisp air that surrounds me. Damn, chills. It's going to be hell pissing out here, but if you're desperate enough you do it. By the time I'm done, my eyes have adjusted to the darkness and I see that Cassie has woken up. I guess that makes sense. She pretty much spent the whole of yesterday sleeping. I'd be more surprised if she wasn't up early this morning.

I open the door to get blasted with the sound of the radio echoing the news of last night. Cassie stares at me. A glimmer of fear can be seen behind her eyes. The radio rambles on about the horrific things I am planning to do, how her parents love her and miss her, and how much of a terrible person I am for taking her away. I wordlessly get in the car, turn off the radio, and start driving.

"Mr. Wright," she says. Here it comes. "That man on the radio said you wanted to hurt me. Why did he say that?"

I am now firmly awake so I am able to realize how sedentary my mind is. I could tell her anything, anything at all but it won't kill the seeds of doubt planted in both of our minds. I try though. I tell her what I've seen. She denies it. I tell her about the fighting and breaking plates. I tell her about the mud. I tell her about getting locked out. I tell her everything she already knows. I tell her that she doesn't deserve any of that.

I don't know if she believes me. She isn't speaking. She isn't even looking at me. She stares out the window. I tell her that none of it was her fault. I tell her that she is innocent in all of this. No clues are revealed. The only thing I can do is reiterate what I've already said. It doesn't change much. It doesn't change anything really.

Perhaps if it did then I would be able to focus on the true situation at hand. There's a toll booth up ahead. I lost myself long ago. If I didn't, I would have some semblance of the reality around me ingrained in my mind. I act stupid. I stop at the toll booth. I'm too focused on clearing my name in the eyes of this child that I forget the mud my name has been dragged through in the eyes of wider society.

I am recognized. Instantly. I panic. The gas pedal squashes under my foot. I nearly rear-end the car in front of me. I manage to turn just in time to skid alongside it.

Now the sirens decide to wail. I'd be able to hear them if Cassie wasn't screaming. I don't think. I just do.

I push the gas pedal down further. The engine revs. I swerve in and out of traffic. I concentrate on not crashing into whatever is in front of me. The wheel is gritted firmly in my shaking fists. I'm not breathing. I swerve. The speedometer shakes frantically. Cassie's chest beats in and out. She's almost as terrified as I am.

Blue and red lights flash in the rear-view window. They're getting closer. A drop of sweat stings my right eye. I swerve again. There's a tunnel up ahead. It's narrow. A police cruiser pulls alongside me. Shit. The officer inside is signalling me to stop. I floor the gas pedal. He's next to me again. The tunnel is getting closer. Think. Dammit, think. Can't go any faster. Goddammit. That's it. I ease off of the gas. He clips my mirror. He goes in the tunnel ahead of me. He's not stopping. I don't either.

Out of the tunnel. I swerve. I speed up. There are no sirens. Why not? Barricade ahead. Not thinking. Turn off the road. Heading the other way. Horns blare. I swerve. Coming back to the tunnel. Tempted to close my eyes. Waiting for impact. Impact doesn't come. Back into the open air. Semi-truck. Swerve left. Swerve right. City bus.

Gunfire. Something pops. I'm losing control of the vehicle. I swerve off of the road. I'm speeding into the forest. Tree left. Tree left. Tree right. Slamming the breaks. Car isn't stopping. Screaming. Don't know who. Hit something. Car launches up. The world spins. The car tumbles. It stops dead. I'm upside-down.

I can finally breathe. I look to Cassie. She's rattled. Her eyes are wide with fear, but she's still breathing. I hear crackling. Oh shit. I try unbuckling my seat belt. The damn thing is jammed. Blood is dripping down my face, making this whole thing harder than it needs to be. I shout to Cassie, but she's beyond my voice right now.

Think. I try to bite the seat belt. It doesn't work. I fiddle around with it, looking all around the car. There's got to be something. I can't end like this. I shake frantically, as if I could flip the car with my weight alone. The glove box jars open and a bunch of debris falls out. I see a gleam of metal in the pile of papers and other junk. I reach for it but it falls way too far out of my grasp.

"Cassie!" I shout. "Cassie listen to me. We're going get very hurt if you don't listen to me."

She doesn't respond. I shake her. Her eyes are still consumed with fear. Goddammit. I punch the window in frustration. Cracks spider along the glass. I've hit an ore of genius in the barren mines. I punch the window again, frantically. The cracks grow. Come on, I'm running out of time. The amber glow of a fire lights the corner of my eyes. The window shatters. I clutch a large fragment of glass. Blood drips down my hand. I'm in too much of a hurry to care.

I attempt to cut the seat belt across my chest. It's working. It's almost enough to give me a smile. My chest is free. I cut the belt across my lap and fall to the ceiling. I feel speckles of pain all along my chest. Perhaps this wasn't the best idea. Still have to ignore the pain, though. I grit my teeth and crawl over to Cassie. Please don't let her belt be jammed too. Thank all gods, known and unknown. She's free in five seconds flat.

I begin crawling out of the car with Cassie on my back. Her weight pushes me down further into the glass. I can almost feel the blood being squeezed out of me. The smell of gasoline is the only reason I'm still going. If I gritted my teeth any harder, I'm sure one of them would go flying out of my mouth. It seems like every second Cassie gets heavier. I'm sliding on my stomach by the time I manage to crawl out of the broken window.

Not done yet. I stand to my feet. Thank you for adrenaline. I walk as far as I can before I have to collapse. I fall to the ground with Cassie on my back. I push her off and roll over with the last of my remaining strength. I turn my head and vomit. Then I look to my hand stained scarlet. I open my fist and let the glass shard rest peacefully there. I don't know if I made it far enough away from the car, but I don't hear crackling anymore and I can't move.

My ears start ringing. There's the explosion. I brace myself for pain as I expect bits and pieces of charred shrapnel to tear my body apart. It doesn't to that. I must have gotten far enough away from the car. I'm feeling so light headed right now as I stare at my bloodied palm. I must be in terrible condition. I don't even want to look to see

if Cassie's—wait Cassie! Is she okay?

I turn to her. She's sitting with her legs folded and covering her ears. My head crashes to the ground. Please, please don't pass out. It's not over yet, not by a country mile. I don't know how far I got into the forest but I must have made some sort of trail, knocking over tinier shrubs and creating prints in the mud. I try to move my arms; either of them. I can't. My body has given up, at least for now.

A breeze blows by and my chest is on fire. I make a pained sound loud enough for Cassie to turn her attention towards me. I realize that I must have made her decision for her. I nearly got us both killed. Hell, if I got us deep enough in the woods we might still perish. I try to talk, but my lips don't want to move either. She's looking at me.

"Mr. Wright, are—are you okay?"

I nod my head as much as I can. It's a lie, but it's one I can afford to tell.

"You're bleeding."

My body is racked with pain as I am forced to laugh. Yup Cassie, I'm bleeding. You're a smart kid. A smart, traumatized kid. A single tear rolls down the eye she can't see. I try to talk once again, but no words come out. Just garbled noises. Cassie doesn't know what to make of it. She puts a hand over my chest and I wince in pain. She retracts her hand in pure reaction.

"Mr. Wright, I believe you..."

"Wha—?"

"I saw it all," she said. "I saw all of those bad things. I—I don't know why."

She stopped speaking, almost as unable to continue as I am. Did her life really flash before her eyes? Hello guilt, my old friend; my old fiend. Have you come back to keep me warm while my body continues to grow cold?